

# Right Understanding.

## NAMO TASSA BHAGAVATO, ARAHATO, SAMMASAMBUDDHASSA

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[Right Understanding, written by Crowley's lifelong friend and teacher Allan Bennett (1872-1923), AKA the Adept Iehi Aour of the Golden Dawn, later known as Buddhist monk Ananda Metteya, was first published in 1913 in the "*Buddhist Review*", Number 5 (pages 85 to 108). -S.Crane]

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WHEN first the King of Truth, the exalted Lord whose humble followers we strive to be, fresh from the victory over self that he had won for the blessing of the world beneath the Bodhi tree, spoke, in the hearing of mankind, that message of Hope Attainable for which the great and wise so long had sought in vain, it was in terms of the Four Aryan or Noble Truths that he declared the essence of his Doctrine. Speaking, as then in the Deer-garden by Benares Town he spoke, to those five erstwhile disciples who had tended him during his long essay of the value of asceticism, it was unnecessary that he should, in that first utterance of the Law, do more than thus concisely sum together the very essence of the Dhamma, for one at least of them to comprehend to the full the meaning and the utter value of the insight into life that he had attained. What memories and what associations must each single word he used have had for those five men, privileged as they had been to follow, almost from the beginning of his spiritual progress, the working of that master mind of all humanity; accustomed as they had been to enter with his guidance and to pass with him, through realm beyond realm of spiritual attainment, even to that ultimate level of cosmic consciousness in which, till his great achievements, consisted the highest wisdom, the greatest attainment known to man. Little, indeed, can we wonder that one of them, Kondanna, caught, as he heard that so compendious enunciation of the mystery of being, at the Master's meaning saw, through the rending veil of nescience, the light, the utter peace beyond: so that, as we have heard the Sutta tell us, in him arose also the vision of the truth, the clear and spotless insight of the Law, and the Master, seeing and rejoicing, announced: "Thou verily hast seen it, O Kondanna;" and Kondanna of the Five was known as "Kondanna who perceived It" from that day.

But rare indeed, even amidst millions of millions of lives, is the insight of a Kondanna, who at the first hearing of it thus succinctly stated, could obtain that perfect vision of the highest truth. Insight so clear, a privilege so blessed, comes but as guerdon and fruitage of many a truth-seeking holy life. We whom the world calls Buddhists often indeed have heard, often have pondered deeply on that message of the Master, that formula of the Aryan Truths the greatest of the Aryans told for the saving of mankind. Yet not for us arises Truth's clear vision, redolent of the peace that reigns in the beyond of life, seeing that still *Avijja*, Nescience, rules in our hearts and minds, blinding us still to Truth's great glory, hiding us still from its all-liberating light. The wording of the Dhamma, that, soothly have we heard: the incomparable surety of those Four Aryan Truths our minds have seen and ascertained in all our intercourse with life. Still, as we ponder on their meaning, deep after deep of new and surer truth opens before the searching of our minds; yet still far off and unattained lies their more inward meaning; and still we look, as to a goal distant by many a weary life, to the day when, at the last, full vision of the Truth shall open for us when, like Kondanna, we shall see and understand.

For this is just the essence of our Buddhism: that there exists, beyond and apart from all our clearest comprehension, a new, deeper and surer mode of comprehension than any we as yet have known. That utter Wisdom, that clear *Heart's* vision of the Truth, which, dawning in one's life, changes for that one all the natal Nescience into perfect Understanding; which makes of one little-knowing as ourselves an Arahant, all-comprehending and all-holy; that fashion of knowing named in our Sacred Language *Anna*, Insight, or *Panna*, Wisdom that it is, and not the sort of intellection whereby we grasp the purport of one of Euclid's problems, of which the Master spoke when he taught us: "It is by not knowing and not understanding that we have come to live so many pain-filled lives." Whoso, of all men greatest and most fortunate, can win it, that vision of the Truth, that new great wisdom, that lucid insight far beyond our

intellection, wins with it liberation from the bondage of the Kamma, freedom from the clinging fetters of the Self delusion, of Craving and of Hate; he knows that for him the weary cycle of transmigration is ended, and enters, even then and there, into Nibbana's never-ending peace.

This then is *Sammaditthi* in its fullest and highest sense; nothing less than the very attainment of Arahantship, the very fulfilment of the purpose of all conscious life in the dawning of a state beyond all consciousness; for, just as the seed must perish as a seed ere it can grow to the fuller, more resplendent life of shoot and stem and bloom, so must the bundle of Life-elements (*Sankharas*) that we call the Self perish before the Goal of Life can be attained; and, just as the first condition of the seed-growth is the darkness and the confining contact of the moist warm earth wherein it germinates to newer life, so is *Avijja*, Nescience, Ignorance, the limitation of the Selfhood with its craving and its passion, the prime necessity of all we know as life. But light and the free wide spaciousness of air, that, and not darkness and restriction, is the need of the plant which blossoms from the seed's decay, and so, the Master taught us, is a new state, a light whereinto Nescience no longer enters, wherein the confines of the Self no more are seen, the characteristic of that State of Sainthood, that Goal of Arahantship to which we all aspire.

To this full rendering of *Sammaditthi* we may give expression by terming it in English *fullest insight*, but in Buddhist technology *Sammaditthi* is often used with a narrower meaning, the narrowest of which is the mere intellectual process of accepting, of regarding as true, the fundamental formula of the Buddhist Religion, namely, the Four Noble Truths. It is defined in the *Saccavibhanga* as the understanding of Sorrow, of Sorrow's cause, of Sorrow's ceasing, and of the path that conducts thereto. It is in this restricted sense only that we are ourselves immediately concerned with it, for here it may truly be regarded as being the *commencement* of the Path: while in its deeper meaning as "fullest insight" it stands at the end of the Path and is, indeed, the means whereby alone that goal may be attained. Here, before going further, it may be as well to correct one not uncommon error as regards the *Atthangika-magga*, the Eightfold Path. It has not uncommonly been represented by writers on Buddhism that the eight members of the Path Right Understanding, Aspiration, Speech, Action, and so forth stand for consecutive stages in the path of spiritual progress. There is, indeed, one sense in which such a classification in respect of time throws light on the working of certain of the mental processes, as when we consider the arising of a simple idea comparable to *Ditthi*, its growth into a desire for action comparable to *Sankappa*, the crystallisation of this mere desire into approximate action, in speech *Vaca*, and its outcome in that action as *Kammanta*. In this series we do in fact see something very similar to the first four members of the Path occurring consecutively in point of time, but where the Noble Eightfold Path is spoken of in Buddhist technology, the eight members are to be regarded as all of them essential elements of that Path, just as the banks, the roadway, the road-metal, the foot-way, the avenue of trees, and so forth may all be regarded, not as consecutive, but as integral elements of the road along its whole length. There is, indeed, as pointed out by Buddhaghosa, a certain element of consecutiveness about the eight elements of the Path, just as we might find in respect of the road we have taken as our analogy—that at one part of the road the banks, at another the avenue of trees, were the most prominent feature of that road. But in that order which we may term the order of attainment, to distinguish it from the order of exposition in which we all know it, the classification is in respect of *Kaya*, *Vaca* and *Citta* body, speech and thought; and in it therefore *Sammaditthi*, as falling under the head of *Citta*, comes last not first, and thus carries in that connection the meaning of *fullest insight* which has been considered above. In general, however, the Eightfold Path is to be considered, not as consisting of eight successive steps or stages, but as *a rule of conduct eightfold in character*, wherein all the eight *angas* or elements are severally and simultaneously essential. Each of these eight members has its minor, middle and major aspect, the position of a given life, in respect of consecutive attainment in progress of time, being measured by the particular division of the several members it has attained.

Where then, in our Buddhist studies, we desire clearly to define the path of progress towards Nibbana in respect of progress through time or through consecutive stages, it is best to turn, not to the Eightfold, but to the Fourfold Path; for the four elements of this latter are in fact consecutive: first the attainment of the stage of *Sotapatti*, then that of *Sakadagami*, then *Anagami*, and finally that of *Arahattam* itself. In this resume of the progress of a being from life (the Ocean of *Samsara* or the Cycle of Transmigration wherein we all exist) to that Beyond of Life which we Buddhists term Nibbana, we see very clearly the

distinction between two of the different usages of the word *Sammaditthi*. That Fourfold Path is classified in respect of the mental fetters or bondages which have been overcome.

Before a being can enter on the first of those four stages, he must have overcome the first three out of the ten bondages of the mind. First amongst those three comes *Sakkayaditthi*, the belief or opinion that there exists within us any sort of permanent self or soul, whether great or small, mean or exalted, gross or subtle. When a thinking being has broken through that bondage (it is like the little stem and root fibre that first pierces through the hard triple cuticle of the germinating seed) and, together with it, has freed himself from *Vicikiccha* dubiety or hesitance between two courses of action, doubt as to whether one's conception of the Dhamma is correct and *Silabbataparamasa*, belief in the power of rites, rituals, spells and prayers to effect any real change within his being, then he has reached the first of the four stages; he has become *Sotapatti*, "He who has entered on the Stream," that stream in the ocean of *Samsara* which sets fair towards Nibbana's distant shore.

Here is implied another usage of our *Sammaditthi*, namely, one standing, as it were, midway between the mere intellectual acceptance of the Four Noble Truths, and that widest meaning of the term which we have designated "fullest insight," for the breaking of this bondage of the Self delusion means far more than the mere holding of the *opinion* "there is no self."

Although standing at the very beginning of the Path, this middle mode of *Sammaditthi* implies a very great advance in comprehension of the Truth about Life. It is said in our Scriptures that whoso has "entered on the Stream," and thus in this middle sense is *Sammaditthi*, has before him at the most not more than seven lives it may be less, but that is the utmost possible; therefore, in reality, the gaining of even thus much of this right understanding is a very great achievement, one which few indeed now living have attained to, a position which can be won only as the outcome of the fruit of many lives of earnest searching after Truth.

Thus we have before us these three modes or meanings of *Sammaditthi*. First, the merely intellectual appreciation of the Truth of the fundamental teaching of the Dhamma, an appreciation to which, as I hope, we all have long since attained. In Ceylon, where the Magadhi, the Mula-bhasa or sacred language of Buddhism, is still, amongst the learned and the monks, a spoken language, if you ask a learned monk of what religion such-and-such a Buddhist is, he will reply, not "Buddhagama" (of the Buddhist religion) but "*Sammaditthi*," using this the narrowest mode or meaning of the term. In English, indeed, we, speaking of our religion, or spoken of by others, term ourselves or are termed "Buddhists," but, convenient as it is, the term is not correct. We are, or should be *Sammaditthi*, having Right Understanding of the fundamental facts of life. We cannot truly claim to be Buddhists, save as a mere measure of convenience and for the sake of ready comprehension of our religious principles, for that term, if we trace it to its root meaning, would imply the claim of full enlightenment, seeing that the root is *bodh*, to be Awakened, Illuminated, Wise. Even if we take the word "Buddhist" to imply a follower of the religious teaching peculiar to the Buddha, it still involves a certain amount of misconception, for, much of what the World calls Buddhist doctrine was well known in India long before the Buddha's day, and is thus in no true sense the special teaching of the Buddha. To one who is *Sammaditthi*, all that pertains to the deeper truths about life, whether first enunciated by the Buddha or no, is part of his religion, and we may take this intellectual assent to Truth as being the determining factor in this the minor mode of usage of *Sammaditthi*. Right Understanding, right appreciation of the Truth, that is this mode of *Sammaditthi*, and that we trust we have all now obtained.

Secondly comes the middle mode, that usage of the term which, together with the breaking of the bondages of doubt and ritual reliance, involves the "entering of the Stream," that great spiritual attainment which constitutes the first stage upon the Fourfold Path. And yet, beyond that, great though in our eyes such attainment be, far yet beyond that lies the major mode wherein *Sammaditthi* means the final destruction of *Avijja*, of Nescience, of Not Understanding, the attainment of the position of the Saint or Arahant, the winning in the highest degree of that fullest insight or higher wisdom which, as has been said, lies far beyond any mode or mental functioning of which we now are cognisant. Between the mere acceptance of right views concerning life and that supreme attainment of the Arahant lies the whole mass

of Buddhist teaching lies also the whole long path of patient culture, of slow growth, extending, it may be, over many a following life, which leads from all life's turmoil to the Peace, to which, in the hope of every Buddhist, not only he, but in the end all living creatures, may one day attain.

Looking thus on the Path as extended between the the two terminal modes of *Sammaditthi* Right Understanding at one end of it, and Fullest Insight at the other and placing, as we may legitimately place, our own mental attitude as somewhere on that line between the minor and the median mode, nearer to the former as our Buddhism is more of a lip-service and less of a heart-service, two most important facts at once appear. Firstly, that for true spiritual progress, the best use, if our Buddhism be true, that we can make of our life, lies only in the passing from our present position to one yet nearer to the middle mode; and, secondly, since the same fundamental element of *Sammaditthi* is found at both ends of the Path, that the dimension in which that Path is extended, its direction, as it were, in the space of Consciousness, lies in what we may term the attainment of a series of ever-deepening Modes of Truth. To make any use at all of our Buddhism, and, if we take it rightly, there is naught else in all our Universe so essentially useful we have to discover in what direction in our lives lies that line of ever-deepening truth; and, having found it, to walk therein to the best of our ability; for that, surely, is the Holy Path itself, and, save through its ever-deepening modes of seeing truth, there is no freedom to be won from all the sorrow and the change of life.

To ascertain what we mean when thus we speak of *ever-deepening modes of truth*, to realise what fashion of falsehood it is that we must needs avoid, let us first consider what sort of understanding is that which is common to all thinking beings, and, on that very ground, is too far steeped in Nescience to be of real service to the aspirant after truth.

Looking on the world presented to him by his senses, one fact predominates all others in the mind of the ordinary man, the fact, namely, that there exists an essential difference between that which for him is *self* his thoughts, words, actions, and all the rest of life and the whole great universe which lies beyond in the region of the Not-self.

That view, fact ever so apparent as it seems to be to the unconverted mind, is the first wrong view, the first great *Micchaditthi* which the All-wisdom of our Master has taught us to avoid. But the ordinary man, taught only by his natal Nescience, by *Avijja*, sees in that illusory distinction between self and the not-self the fundamental fact of life, and from it, as from any start made in the wrong direction, all the wrong views of life depend. Just as it needed the wisdom of a Copernicus to overcome for the mass of civilised humanity the delusion that the Sun goes daily round the earth, and just as the opponents of Copernican Astronomy objected that it was the common daily testimony of the sense of sight of every being that it *did* so move, so did it need, for us, the wisdom of the Buddha to overcome for us his followers that deepest delusion of the central Selfhood, and just so, also, is still the cry of the opponents of his teaching that the daily momentary testimony of our own minds declares to us this Selfhood as the central fact of life.

So starting wrongly, the world's philosophies of necessity grow to be further and further from the Truth they seek. Finding this Selfhood as the central fact of life, they deduce, from the phenomena about them, the existence of other selves besides their own. The savage, seeing the motion of Sun and Moon and star and stream and all the manifold phenomena of being, hearing the multitudinous sounds of Nature, attributes to each and all of them a separate self, a god or spirit using each and all, just as he fancies, from his wrong understanding about life, he uses his various organs of motion and of speech. When, later on in course of evolution, the savage comes to the point where families coalesce into tribes and clans, and these into nations ruled over by one sovereign, so in his mind grows the religious Idea; the gods of star and earth and forest slowly take the place of servient angels, with one great Self, their Ruler, the Soul or Self of Space, wherein all these lesser beings have their dwelling-place. So does the religious consciousness of man, over great periods of time, pass from polytheism to monotheism or to pantheism, till, passed out of savagery, man grows to mental adolescence, by which time we generally find his monotheism or his pantheism well established, even as now they are in many directions in the Western World.

Another very vital factor in the moulding of the religious consciousness of mankind (for the origin of religion is immensely complex, by no means taking its birth from one set of facts or theories alone) added its record also to the common testimony of all mankind's experience as to the existence of the Self the factor, namely, of Religious Experience, of the partial recollection, by saint and seer, of the manifold states of consciousness that exist beyond that realm of waking life wherein we normally act and live. More clear-seeing, indeed, in the greater light of consciousness to which they in their several attainments had achieved, the seers of all times (at least such of their number as attained to the higher Jhanas, the states of consciousness pertaining to the Formless Worlds) announced the fact that, with progression upwards, element after element of the *lower* self was cast aside, till, in the ultimate of consciousness, they saw, no longer the manifold selfhoods of our experience, but *One Self*, one highest self, alone; a self which they, with minds already cast in the theistic mode by reason of the full religious teaching of their nation, identified with the Supreme Being who had been hypothesised as having made or caused to emanate all this universal life. Thus, rightly casting out in the light of their superior experience the petty self of man, they still adhered to a still greater, because subtler, if far more deeply lying delusion, the conception of an ultimate, enduring, blissful higher selfhood, wherefrom all life has consciously, intentionally, been emanated; wherein whoso will rightly train his mind may merge his lesser selfhood, as the drop mixes with the wide ocean wave.

Growing side by side with this rich crop of wrong opinions, sprang likewise, intimately connected with it, another group of misconceptions as to the facts of life, a group which, in its totality, we may conveniently term the theory of the joy of life, the characteristic of the undeveloped, the immature consciousness of the little child. Even now, amongst the most advanced units of the most civilised of nations, but few have emerged from that epoch into the period of mental adolescence, for the sense of joy is perhaps the acutest of all.

Let us cast back our own minds to the days of our early childhood, and, if the memory has not altogether faded, we shall see how true this is; we shall remember how wonderful and fair and noble and good did all existence seem; how joy seemed the reality, and sorrow only a passing, if a dreaded, shadow to its glorious light. We shall recall the vivid sense of wonder and of pleasure that came with each new phenomenon of life; how even some new-seen insect might arouse a perfect ecstasy of wonder; how every hour, nay every moment of the waking life seemed dear and pleasant, so that even when tired out, we hated the very thought of sleeping, since that would mean the deprivation of some few hours of blissful, conscious life. That is the characteristic of the infant consciousness, that sense of joy in life, and in this, as in so many ways, our own experience as children but epitomised the common daily condition of human consciousness in its early days. For such is the peculiarity of our growth, that the human individual in process of only a few years of infancy and childhood epitomises in his life and thought the by-gone history of the whole human race whose experience he inherits. Let us watch the daily growth of a young child, and we shall see the truth of this, shall see the infant life telling the story of the development of all humanity, from the tree-dwelling anthropoid, scarcely yet a man, through the Age of Stone down to the hunting, fighting, kingdom-organising age from which even now only the most advanced units of our kind have fairly grown. The child mind sees and hears, and finds deep-rooted joy in the mere sight and hearing, but it does not, till grown out of childhood's age, *think of what it all must mean*. Due to this, and again to the reproduction of the history of savage man, is the child's sometimes so shocking callousness to pain; wonderful and therefore pleasant in its eyes is the sight of the movements executed by some tortured animal; just because the movements executed are new and strange, the sight of them gives pleasure, and so, with all but a small minority of quite exceptional children, we have to educate the young out of the savage instinct to kill and torture the lower forms of life.

This early Joy in Life, so characteristic of the young, the mentally immature and thoughtless, bulking so largely as it still does in human thought, came, of necessity, profoundly to affect the development of religious thought meaning by that term, as we have all along implied, man's way of looking at the deeper things of life; his attempts to propound an answer to the riddle of existence. Applying, as always (in the nescience-working of the mind) the conditionings of his own life to the greater life about him, man early came to hold the view that all in life was essentially *good*, the joy of life in his own heart lie reflected on the world about him, and in particular did he attribute joy and graciousness and goodness to the Self

Supreme he later came to conceive as having made the earth and sky. He himself, for service of his daily needs, could fashion out of stone and wood and earth his implements of hunting, warring, cooking; and so again he came to think that all this universe, so fair and good before his mental vision, must likewise have been fashioned by that Great Being; and, remembering his own delight in the accomplishment of work well done, the joy of the maker over some tool or structure well adapted to its purpose, he could even conceive the Deity as resting from his labour of creation, and looking on the world that he had made and seeing that it all was "good."

Yet knowledge grows, and, with its growth comes deeper insight and a truer appreciation of the real nature of the universe about us and within. With that growth of mental stature, the conceptions of the Deity, this personification of the ultimate forces of our being, comes of necessity to take a less and less important place within the thoughts of men; seeing, as they do, with growing understanding how much of utterly useless suffering there is in life; learning, as they do, if very slowly, that in truth there is in all life no Persona, no Self whether the personal or the greater Selfhood but only a continuum, a flux of Being, a ceaseless movement of the restless tides of life. Slow, indeed, is that coming to mental adolescence even still, by reason of the influence on our speech of that wrong view of life we say, "I think," where rightly we should say, "It thinks."

The Indian of the Buddha's time said "the god rains" where we should say "it rains." We have indeed advanced to the intransitive form in this respect, but how long will the Self persist in our speech in respect of human actions? And, with this personification of Life's phenomena, indissolubly connected with it as springing from the same source, comes Nescience, that other theory of the joy of life, ideas so plausibly and so naturally associated in the lines of that English poet who exclaims: "God's in His Heaven, all's right with the world."

Such are the theories of life termed by the Buddha *Micchaditthi*-wrong views, the sort of Not Understanding we must sheer avoid if ever we are to merit the title *Sammaditthi*. Firstly, the theory of the Self, the conception that life is enselved, that there is, within or behind it, an unchanging vital persona whether regarded as ultimately one or many; secondly, the theory of the joy of life, the view that life is in its fundamental nature blissful, good to live for sake of its mere pleasures, and that by any means whatever we may realise therein, not the well-known Karmic sequence of the craving for pleasure bringing ultimately pain, but an ever-enduring succession of pleasurable states of consciousness, a permanent happiness resulting from the continued gratification of the desire for experience, for life.

These are the two great root conceptions springing from *Avijja*, from Nescience, Ignorance, the Not-understanding of the real nature of life, the rejection of which constitutes the basis of *Sammaditthi* in its minor mode and here, before going further, we may well pause to consider why these mere theories about life should constitute from the Buddhist point of view so serious a danger to the wellbeing of humanity, and so grave an obstacle, that the very first step on the Path cannot be taken till they have been for ever set aside. Both of them have their roots in the deepest places of the human heart; it is fair and sweet and pleasant to a man to think that he, the *real* 'He' as the *Attavadin* would put it, is immortal, changeless, sure (if he but lived aright) of inheriting a blissful and an eternal life; to conceive of all this world as being made and guided by a Great Person infinitely powerful and beneficent, willing and able to help, and to look on life as in its essence blissful, pleasant, good to live. All this being so, why make the rejection of these theories the very test of Buddhist Orthodoxy, if we may use the term, or how does it happen that, in a Religion so essentially practical as is Buddhism, the merely intellectual acceptance or rejection of certain theories should hold so prominent a place?

The answer to that question to one who not yet is *Sammaditthi* is the most terrible in all the world; it is an answer which, if it stood alone, would leave no hope or help or purpose in all our life; it simply runs, they are Untrue. To the Buddhist, Truth, the search after and the attainment of Truth, is his Religion, and no man may hope to win the Truth who starts out in the wrong direction; who seeks for Truth whilst laying to his heart the false if fair solace that these wrong views present.

Untrue! And is the Truth, then, worthy of so great a sacrifice, that a man must needs give up convictions the most deeply-rooted and consoling for its sake alone? Answers the Buddhist, Truth not alone denies the false; it goes far deeper, it affirms the True. So great and so inspiring to our lives, and in its deeper levels so profound, so far beyond our knowing is the Truth, that it would be worthy of all sacrifice in all the worlds. Truth is greater than our hopes, nearer and yet dearer, could we but see and know it, than even our so cherished theory of the Selfhood, of the personal immortal life; wider is Truth than Heaven, vaster than the abyss of space; greater than aught with which we can compare it. It is so free and High! Renunciation? Surely. Did ever the seed give being to the flower, shedding its perfume on the morning breeze, but first, below there in the darkness of the mire, it gave its own life that a greater life might come? That is why Renunciation is the key-note of all Buddhist practice, and that is why the first step to be taken is the rejection utterly of all that is not utterly true.

For, in Buddhism, we are concerned with *facts* not *theories*. If ever we make our hearts, our minds, worthy receptacles of Truth's sweet *Amrita*, we must first cleanse them from every trace of the bitter drugs *Avijja* has to give. Untrue, these two wrong views of life bear in themselves the seal and proof of their untruth: to see this fact, we have but to consider what has been the fruit of them in the history of humanity, to observe their outcome in the story of the creeds and faiths of all mankind. The destroying progress of Islam, the tortures of the Inquisition, the awful period of the Dark Ages, when no man dared to breathe his free thoughts on the air of a mind-enslaved continent these, and I know not, dare not think, what total sum of human agony and misdirected human energy and work, are the fruits of those wrong views of life of them alone. It was because men dreamed they had immortal souls destined to personal immortality of joy (or darker side of it, to immortality of torture) and must placate the Self Supreme as they, poor, grovelling, nescience-darkened hearts, were then wont to placate their lords and kings, that they could kill, burn, torture even the greatest, noblest minds that ever their race gave birth to. For what cruelty, what torture mattered in the *now*, if Eternity to-morrow weighed against it in the other scale? One of the world's greatest epics of Religion, the Bhagavad-Gita is utterly marred by that deadly advice of Krishna to his disciple, who, on the point of plunging all his kith and kin into suicidal warfare, was very properly seized with pity-born compunction, but was ordered in the name of the soul-theory to go on and kill, seeing that the Self was spiritual and could not be destroyed. If such outcomes of the Atma theory as these could make a Shelley rightly cry, "The Name of God hath fenced about all crimes with holiness," can we not see, without looking further, that Truth is absent from all views of life where such sad fruits can follow on acceptance of those views?

And why is this? How is it that these twin ideas have so imbruted man and have brought more misery and blood upon the earth than any other single instrument of human folly and misdeed? Just, so our Master taught us, because they spring from Nescience, from man's untrained desires, because they are but theories, merely ways of seeing things, *ditthis*, things having no foundation, in truth or in fact. There lies the whole solution of the problem, the point in the supreme importance of *Sammaditthi*, right understanding of the facts of life. Who ever fought or hated or inflicted suffering on life over facts? No man of all the myriads that have ever lived. But over views, mere theories, things having no foundation save in the cobwebs of some pent-up Nescience-darkened human mind; over mere theories, such that no man could, ever tell the truth of them, men have always quarrelled and ever will, until at last such follies are for ever set aside, and no man shall live so ignorantly as to say "I hold such and such a theory, have worked it out, adopted it as mine, and, as it is my view, I am ready to fight for it against the world at large."

Nor think that in the past alone have these wrong views of life wrought damage to human progress, or that now we have so far progressed that their power for ill-doing has passed away from among the causes of life's unceasing suffering on earth. Even to-day, in the names of those twin theories, agony inconceivable is being inflicted upon life; even to-day a hundred thousand altars cast the ill savour of their sacrifices upon the air. Follies, we may say, committed by barbarians who, seeking more of joy in this world or the next, strive to placate their imaginary gods ensolved. So be it folly enough it is, but not worse folly or more cruel than much, so much, that even now is being perpetrated in the midst of the much vaunted civilisation of the West. If, as is happily the case, no more the cries of human victims, burnt living in the market-places of our towns in the names of those two modes of Nescience, prove their untruth and

potency for evil in the hearts of men, still, under other names and forms, are they wreaking woe untold on all mankind.

To the *Self* theory, as manifested under the form of so-called *patriotism*, is due the fact that so large a proportion of the manhood of the modern nations, drawn from useful service to mankind in field or factory, is wasted, worse than wasted, in the study and practice of warfare; in what, in plain English, is the study and practice of the most efficient method of achieving on a wholesale scale the most terrible of all human crimes, murder. To the same manifestation of the *Self* delusion is due the fact that so large a proportion of the wealth and resources of the Western nations is wasted on this same folly of armaments; only because men will cherish the *Self* theory; will not understand that we all, English, Germans, French, and so forth, alike are human beings, fellow creatures, brothers, members of the one great fraternity of conscious, suffering living beings who need not war, like wolves or savages, *did they but understand*. It is the wrong view: "I am English; glorious English nationality is mine; therefore it behoves me to fight against persons who have another sort of *Self* theory of the kind and say, 'No, but a Teuton I.'" It is that wrong view which now makes it necessary to waste the bulk of the resources of every branch of the West-Aryan Race on armaments or war, when so much might, in the present state of our knowledge, be achieved by man, were that great wealth to be expended in combating, not only physical disease, but those far more fatal mental sicknesses, Anglophobia and so forth, to which so much of the Western misery is due.

And to the wrong view of the joy of life also how much of our Occidental suffering may be assigned! Believing that in life joy may somehow be gained, we increase and increase instead of seeking to diminish the number of things we say we "need." Climatic conditions of necessity add to the number of the actual necessities of life as compared with the simple needs of warmer climates, but, beyond those actual necessities, beyond the needs of science and of art and literature, beyond our true needs, how much our modern civilisation now produces just by reason of this false belief in the joy of life, the mere theory that by much possession we may come to happiness. And, to produce that vast array of things really useless, thousands and hundreds of thousands of men, women, and even little children must live squalid and hopeless lives, ever in fear of some catastrophe of commerce that may deprive them of food, warmth and shelter; and how many, alas! of these producers of the *unnecessaries* of life are, even now, short of due food, lacking the barest of human comforts!

Thus, looking even into the present-day conditions of our human existence, we see how deadly, how full of poison for humanity, are the two views or theories of life which, warned by our Master, we who are *Sammaditthi* have come to reject as false and full of danger and fear. Heart's-poisons in very truth are they, poisoning the innermost lives of man; yet, in one after another of their endless manifestations, whether as religious dogmas, as political or national conceptions, as militarism or as commercialism, the minds of men still seize upon them with avidity; still give them great, high-sounding and heart-stirring names, just as, in the old Buddhist simile, a man afflicted with a grievous open sore should, from mere fear of thinking of it, cover it up from sight with piled-up layer after layer of gold-leaf, since so it seems no longer hideous, while corruption festers beneath it all! Great names, high-sounding words, wonderful theories of things that no man knows, the How and Why of life, such now, as ever, is the gold-leaf this poor suffering humanity applies to its festering wounds! How long, how sorrow-laden long must it yet be, ere it will tear away all this glittering gilding of mere empty and high-sounding terms, and dare to look on life as in very truth it is; or have the wit to turn to that All-greatest of the heart's physicians who, with Truth's healing salve, stands ever ready to allay the growing poison and the fever of our wound.

That salve, the healing, even though a bitter-seeming balm, is *Sammaditthi*, Right Understanding of the facts of life, the comprehension of the truth about existence, the pulling off of the gold-leaf and examination and recognition of the true sources of our pain. To dare to look on life as it really is *Anicca*, *Dukkha*, *Anatta*; transient, sorrow-laden, and devoid of selfhood that is the first step to be taken. It means the casting out of all the vain reliances and theories that ever the mind of man has spun; the setting aside, since such conduce not to our urgent need of healing, of all such questionings as how life came to be, whence it is, or whither it shall go.



Speaking of the particular religious aspects of the two great wrong views, we have said that their casting off seems at first sight a thing most cruel and most terrible; it is the plucking off of the gold-leaf from the poisoned wound. Some few rash minds indeed have dared to do that, not knowing, alas for them, of the physician and his salve, and, seeing what lay beneath it all, these have come straight to yet another wrong view about it all. Seeing the suffering inseparable from all life, understanding the meaning of the fact that, in the body's evolution, what is now for us sensation is the direct descendant of Irritability, the reaction to irritation of the primordial protoplasm, they have come to formulate a new wrong view of life, one which does not possess the merit even of looking beautiful as the old gold-leaf method did. That view is now termed Pessimism; we may briefly put it thus. There is no Soul, no God but a new sort of Eternal Selfhood or principle called Matter. That matter is itself insentient, but somehow, by mere chance, certain combinations of it occurred which were so unstable as to involve a constant molecular change; a taking in of new molecules at one point and a turning out of old ones at another. By virtue of the action of environment this primordial life-stuff presently developed into what we now are living, conscious beings destined to cease at death and pass away as uselessly as first we came. In this view, one happily held now by but a few adherents, there is no law in life at all, that is, no law of life as such; our existence came by chance, and one day, when the earth grows cold or hot enough, it will similarly perish. All life is thus regarded as not merely full of sorrow and of evil, but as without a purpose or a future. Wonderful, ever miraculous, as to the thoughtful man it is, life has, in this view, no origin save chance and the workings of the blind laws of Nature; no hope save Death with all its suffering left unrewarded; no aim, no end, no purpose and no brighter goal.

Few men ever will, we may hope, come to hold that so terrible a view of existence; certainly no Buddhist will. But it is mentioned here to introduce a most important point in Buddhist teaching, namely, that Pessimism is from the Buddhist standpoint just as wrong as the optimistic and theistic theories which we have already discussed. For, in this great question of the good and evil of existence, this teaching ever pursues the Middle Way, as in all matters. In the first sermon of the Buddha, the importance of avoiding such extremes of view was emphasised by His terming the Path the Middle Way. Preached, as that sermon was, to monks accustomed to regard self-torture as the means of liberation from suffering, the essence of the religious life, the contrast was drawn between the life of self-torture and the life of self-indulgence, and the Middle Way, the Way that leads to Truth, to fullest insight, was announced as lying between these two extremes. But in our question of life's good and ill the same rule applies; whilst we must, if *Sammaditthi* reject the theories of the Self and of the joy of life, we must likewise reject the opposite extreme of view, the theory of Pessimism.

Life then, says the Buddhist, is full of suffering, but it may be so directed as to lead to the Beyond of Life, to the great peace of Nibbana, a state so utterly different from the life we know, that we can use no word whereby positively to define it. Though in our right understanding there is no Self Supreme that made these worlds and by his will upholds and rules them, there is a Power that moves to Righteousness and brings all beings to the Greater Light; the Power of Wisdom, of that high holy insight which we have seen is *Sammaditthi's* major mode of use. Thus, as much as in the Theist's view of it, life has for the Buddhist both a hope, and, if we will, a purpose; this right view declares the existence of a goal so great and high that we are forbidden even to call it life.

Yet this great hope in Buddhism, this goal without which all life were purposeless, its long suffering useless and inexcusable, this Ideal of the Peace beyond all life is no mere view or empty theory. We Buddhists hold that hope not by any means based on faith or trust, as must ever form the basis of the Theist's hope. It is deduced by us from life's phenomena, attested in chief by the King of Truth, the Great Teacher who first in our history attained that Peace by the testimony of the million Great Ones who, since He discovered the way thereto, have walked in the Path that He proclaimed. It is attested by our own experience, by the fact that we can see, to just the extent we strive to follow the Middle Way ourselves, the utter truth, the ever-deepening truth, of all that Noble Aryan Teaching of Truth's King. Following it as best we can, we, too, find the Great Peace growing in our hearts, and thus to us this ideal of Nibbana is no mere view, but a reality ever deepening as our life grows nearer to the Law.

When, growing out of that period of mental childhood in which all life seems so fair and pleasant, men come to mental adolescence (as, even now, so many in the Western World are growing at this day), with the passing of their immaturity passes the keen sense of the joy of life, for knowledge grows as grows the mind of man. Man comes to see that, behind the so fair-seeming mask of life, lies death. He begins to understand that the very law of evolution is suffering and that the species which most can suffer best survives. No more can one, understanding the great and awful suffering involved in life, regard it as created by an omnipotent and all-loving Selfhood; no more can one, who once has sought by clear analysis in his own heart for that imagined lesser Self of man, conceive of aught within him as eternal, changeless or secure. Looking deeper, and, if he be fortunate, aided by the Truth the Master left us, the adolescent mind perceives how all there is in life as now we know it is of necessity changeful; he sees how the great sequences of the law of life, the Kamma, make of suffering an essential element of all component being; he sees that that which formerly he conceived of as his Self eternal, stable, is but a wave in life's great ocean, destined, not indeed as in the pessimist's thought to utter annihilation after a little span of such sad sordid life as living creatures on our planet know, but to give place, at the end of all its long cycle of evolving transmigration, to a state beyond all thought and naming; the Peace, the Purpose, the Fruition of all Life.

Not one Selfhood of our own, different from the other selves of all the universe, but a bundle of sankharas, of elements of the common life that is the idea which is implied. Just as the elements of the body enter into our food stream, become for a little while integral portions of our being and then, in the ceaseless flux, pass out on their further never-resting course of life, so, in this Buddhist view, do these sankharas come, dwell for a little in our minds, then pass again, a never-ceasing flux of thought. Just as some elements of our corporeal frames are, as it were, nobler or of higher import to our life than others, and some again inimical to our welfare, so is it with the elements of thought. Here and now to-day a whole group of the nobler of them of the elements of thought set in motion we know not when but wrought to their present form in the mind of that Great One whom we strive to follow, thoughts which have echoed down through life for five-and-twenty centuries is passing once again through the medium of the spoken or the printed word into our several minds. To-morrow, illuminated, peradventure, by some new illustration of their meaning, they will be passing from our minds into yet others, and so on until life shall end at last in Peace.

From this conception of the flux of thought follow many points of great importance. One is the need we have of constantly attending to the thought-foods of our minds, just as we attend to the food-stuffs of our bodies; but we must reject from our mental diet the ill thoughts, and definitely cultivate the assimilation of high and holy ones. Another point of yet greater moment is the fact that all conscious life is One, one ocean whereof our several minds are now the waves, whose force is ever giving rise to further wavelets; waves not "another" and yet not "the same." It is the flux which passes on and, in its changing, in some sense yet endures. It is the totality of that flux now at this moment in us that we call ourselves. Thus rightly understood, life becomes as one, one which we can best help onward as we ennoble each thought-element in its passage through our minds; wherefore, from the Buddhist view-point all reformation, all attempt to help on life, can best be effected by first purging our immediate life kingdom of the "Self."

And now, finally, one thought remains to be considered. We have seen what are the views and theories which we must fain avoid if we shall make us worthy of the title *Sammaditthi*. We have seen how the right-view of life, teaching as it does life's oneness, makes for compassion, for endurance, for the ennobling of all our Relations. No more, as in the view of Selfhood, looking on self and life as two different things, we now understand them one. We see, too, how we each may, humble though we be, help on life at large, and learn how only we can help life by making this understanding of our oneness with it enter, in practice, into all our daily ways as pity and as love. We see how this right view of life might change the world to Paradise to-morrow; how all the bitter pain of life comes only from following the false, the selfish view. All this is but the minor mode of *Sammaditthi*, just the intellectual appreciation of the fundamental Buddhist truths. What lies beyond? What must we do so as to enter upon that Fourfold Path of attainment on the first step of which stands, not this minor but *Sammaditthi*'s middle mode? The answer is: "Just live that Understanding." Let it be no mere vain theory, for still a theory it is, until it enters into practice in our

own, our very lives. So to direct the course in life's great ocean of this our group of elements that, with each thought that passes from us, a little gain has come to life at large; so to suppress with constant watchfulness the evil, selfish thoughts; to cultivate the nobler self-renouncing ones; to understand how sorrow rules inalienable from life, and yet, because beyond, the Peace is ever reigning; how we may so restrain our ways that, when we die, all life may have become a little bit the nobler and the nearer to the Peace, because we lived and suffered. Briefly, to live Right Understanding; not to make an empty talk of it. All these things it is, to come nearer to that deeper middle mode of Truth about Right Understanding, the winning of which means the entering of the great, ancient, holy stream of deathless light.

**ANANDA METTEYA**